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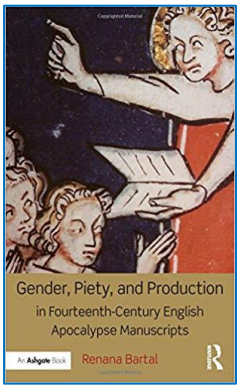

Review of Renana Bartal, *Gender, Piety, and Production in Fourteenth-Century English Apocalypse Manuscripts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), ISBN: 978-1-4724-5911-4

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From its emergence *c*. 1250, the lavishly illustrated Apocalypse manuscript with its complex image cycles remained popular in England until the fifteenth century, owned and used by both clergy and laity. Yet thirteenth-century manuscripts, particularly the Lambeth, Trinity, Douce, and Gulbenkian Apocalypses, continue to dominate scholarly discussion of the Anglo-French Apocalypse tradition. With the exception of the attention given to the Corpus Christi Apocalypse (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 20), fourteenth-century English Apocalypses are relatively understudied. Little published work has integrated these manuscripts into discussions of fourteenth-century English manuscript culture, patterns of female book ownership and use, and wider investigations of late medieval English piety and devotional literacy. Renana Bartal's *Gender, Piety, and Production in Fourteenth-Century English Apocalypse Manuscripts* fills this gap in the field with meticulous scholarship, detailed and persuasive visual analysis, and a thorough command of both the medieval sources and the secondary literature.

Bartal's study is concerned with interrogating "the differences" (3) between three early fourteenth-century English Apocalypse manuscripts illuminated by the same group of artists, the Pepys, Selden, and Brussels Apocalypses. Taking a different approach from the century-long tradition of classifying Apocalypse manuscripts into various groups or families, and seeking to establish stemma and archetypes in a philological manner, Bartal states at the outset her dual concern with both production and use. Her study examines "the work of a group of illuminators previously consigned to the fringes of art historical scholarship" in order to offer "insights into their working methods and authorship" (4). It also places the three manuscripts "in their textual and social contexts," to provide "new insights into the role that Apocalypse illuminations played in the pastoral care of their users" (8-9).

The first chapter is focussed on the Pepys Apocalypse (Cambridge, Magdalene College MS Pepys 1803), containing the text of Revelation in Latin and an Anglo-Norman translation in metrical verse, but no further exegetical commentary. Bartal suggests the manuscript's intended reader/s were females dedicated to the religious life, highlighting its parallels with Anglo-Norman versifications of the Apocalypse text made for Shaftesbury Abbey and Nuneaton Priory (17). She then considers Pepys as the finest example of a subgroup of four closely-related Apocalypse manuscripts (in addition to the Pepys Apocalypse; London, British Library MS Royal 2.D.XIII; Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Auct. D.4.14, and the Yorkshire Apocalypse now in the Wormsley Library, Oxfordshire). Bartal accounts

for the complex differences in the texts and pictorial cycles of the group by positing a common workshop model that circulated separately from the text (20).

The bulk of the chapter is devoted to a close visual analysis of selected images from Pepys, demonstrating how changes to the iconography and composition of its miniatures clarify exegetical meanings in the Biblical text. They also enhance the viewer's emotional engagement with their book. Discussing the illustration to Revelation 19.6-9 on fol. 39v of Pepys, describing the Heavenly Marriage of the Lamb, Bartal highlights the substitution of the ring held by the kneeling bride for a round host (material first explored in her article for *Viator*). Identifying the bride of the Lamb with Ecclesia and the marriage banquet with the Eucharistic feast, the image makes "visually explicit the content of absent commentaries" (33). A nun placed in a marital bond with Christ could visualize herself as the heavenly bride, equate herself with the priest elevating the host during the Mass, and identify herself with the lay recipient instructed to kneel in adoration before the elevated host (33-35). Throughout, the Pepys images emphasize moral or tropological approaches to the text of Revelation (39). Such a methodology accords with contemporary models for how nuns were expected to engage in Biblical study. The manuscript's careful visual elucidation of scripture, merging St John's "*figuras* with their *significata*" (46) would enable a female reader to access St John's revelation at the highest level of spiritual understanding. The alterations made to the miniatures of the Pepys cycle are small ones: nuances of composition or gesture that lead Bartal to propose the

artist of the Pepys Apocalypse, rather than a clerical supervisor, as the decision-maker behind this process of visual modification (46-47).

MS Royal 19 B XV: f.44v: St John with the Angel. Photo: London, British Library.

The second chapter discusses the Selden Apocalypse (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Selden Supra 38), illuminated by a single artist sometime between 1315 and 1325. The manuscript combines an illustrated Anglo-Norman text narrating events from the childhood of Christ, the *Évangile de l'Enfance*, with an illustrated "French prose Apocalypse" (59). While the *Évangile* survives in both Anglo-Norman and Old French versions, it isn't clear why Bartal uses "French" in preference to "Anglo-Norman" throughout to refer to the Apocalypse text if she is again referring to the French vernacular used in fourteenth-century England. Richard K. Emmerson's recent survey, *Apocalypse Illuminated. The Visual Exegesis of Revelation in Medieval Illustrated Manuscripts* (Pennsylvania, 2018)

characterizes the vernacular French content of all three manuscripts as "Anglo-Norman" (128, Table 2), for example. It is a minor issue of terminology, but it relates to a slight recurring problem: throughout, Bartal assumes that the reader shares her expert and detailed knowledge of the manuscripts discussed. At times, it would have been helpful to include more lucid introductory summaries of the relevant manuscripts and their contents, complementing the excellent précises Bartal does provide for devotional texts such as the *Évangile* or the *Lumere as lais*. To the uninitiated, her first discussion of the *c*. 1290-1300 Nuneaton Book, for example (17), is a little confusing. A preparatory sentence or two on the variety of texts found in this compilation, of the type that actually appears at p. 39, as part of an admirably clear and succinct narration of the emergence of vernacular pastoral literature after the Fourth Lateran Council, and the role of bishops in this process, would have done much to orientate earlier readers. Similarly, there is no reason for the Lambeth Apocalypse to appear twice in the general index, named as the "Apocalypse of Eleanor de Quincy" and again as the "Lambeth Apocalypse." However, these tiny slips do not detract from the overall clarity of the monograph's argument and expression throughout.

Using ultraviolet light to read an erased inscription, Bartal identifies the original owner of Selden as one "Johanna de Bichopusdon" or Bishopesdon, née Grafton, from a knightly landed family based in the south-west of England (60). Bartal suggests that the manuscript was used for the spiritual instruction and edification of both Johanna and her children. To this end, the Selden illuminator

"emphasized the narrative, avoided theological complexities and privileged the literal" meaning of the Biblical text (64). Bartal then explores the artist's creative use of two visual sources to illustrate Selden: the Corpus-Lambeth stem and the workshop model used for the Pepys Apocalypse. Sometimes, one source was prioritized over another. In other miniatures, the maker of Selden combined elements from both models to bring out the literal meaning of Revelation.

MS Royal 19 B XV: f.17r: The Angel in Heaven. Photo: London: British Library

Bartal again demonstrates the veracity of her arguments through a close and careful visual analysis of selected miniatures. For example, the angels of the four winds described in Revelation 7.1-8 are not shown within a cross, as in the Corpus-Lambeth tradition, a detail that emphasizes the idea of the cross as the "invisible inner structure of the world" and echoes medieval cosmological diagrams (83-84). Instead, the illustration on fol. 60v depicts the earth, sea, and trees specifically

detailed in the text of Revelation 7:1. Throughout the chapter, Bartal explores some of the intended functions of Selden with reference to the poetic epilogue of the *Évangile* text, examining the role of sight as a perceived means of engaging the unlearned, just as the literal sense of scripture was thought most edifying for the "simple" lay reader (61-64, 87-93).

Chapter three examines the Brussels Apocalypse (Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale MS II 282), another combination of vernacular prose text and commentary, but this time accompanied by an encyclopaedic manual of religious instruction, the *Lumere as lais*. It would have been helpful for Bartal to note the existence of the unillustrated vernacular text found on fols. 155r-157v of the manuscript, the *Penitence of Adam*, again to orientate non-specialist readers. Brussels has often been considered as a copy of the Queen Mary Apocalypse (London, British Library MS Royal 19 B XV). Bartal convincingly argues that the manuscript was in fact "the model for the Queen Mary Apocalypse, which both imitated some of its features and inventively remedied its shortcomings" (104, 123-133). A unique image of St Paul preaching before tonsured male clerics which opens the Apocalypse can be read "as an indication of the Brussels manuscript's intended readership" (106). Earlier in the monograph, Bartal noted the pronounced association between women and the physical body: "male authors assumed that women could not transcend the physical to attain the spiritual, as a male cleric might do" (46, see also 59). Gender informs her analysis of the spiritual aims of Pepys and Selden to compelling effect. Given that the title of her study is "Gender" and not "Women," the issue could have been

usefully raised again in chapter three with regard to the potentially male, clerical readership of Brussels and the particularities of its image cycle.

MS Royal 19 B XV: f.5v: The Door Open in Heaven. Photo: London, British Library.

Perhaps intended for a more learned audience than the manuscripts explored so far, Bartal shows how the artist of Brussels avoided all literalism and simplification, such as the inclusion of clarifying inscriptions, in his bid to illustrate as much of the Biblical text as possible. Once again, her arguments are anchored through close visual analysis and comparison, here with the Queen Mary Apocalypse and the Morgan Apocalypse (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library MS M. 524). Bartal demonstrates how the manuscript's illustration to Revelation 4.1, the Door Open in Heaven, cues and enacts the reader's own efforts at mystical contemplation and spiritual ascent (118), for example. Bartal suggests that the pictorial program of Brussels was designed to "affirm its compatibility" with both

the detailed moralizing and catechetical knowledge available in the *Lumere* (119), and the moral lessons offered by the Apocalypse commentary. Audience identification was further encouraged by explicit pictorial reference to "viewers' contemporary lives" (121). One wonders if the *Penitence of Adam* text may have had relevance in this context. At the close of the chapter, Bartal returns to fourteenth-century workshop practices, showing that traces of images between the folios, a result of the "inattentive placement of a pouncing stencil after use" (135) reveal the different ways in which Brussels was used as an authoritative model for other works, perhaps in different media. Copied freehand by the makers of the Queen Mary Apocalypse, the image cycle in Brussels was evidently reproduced by a more mechanical procedure for other uses (136).

In her conclusion, Bartal summarizes how the "specific female readership of Selden and Pepys helps to clarify their textual and iconographic variations" (145) and more broadly how "Apocalypse illustration could be adjusted to accommodate the needs of distinct groups of readers" (146). Perhaps gender could have again more explicitly informed her discussion and wider conclusions. Whatever the perceived needs of their original readers, Selden and Brussels both seem to have passed into the hands of members of the opposite sex by the fifteenth century (60-1,106). Bartal convincingly argues that the three Apocalypse manuscripts assessed in her monograph were deliberately catering to the requirements and expectations of their male/female and lay/clerical viewers. Yet later audiences do not seem to have been limited or discouraged by these characteristics of the manuscripts. As the laity

might enter the convent later in life, fourteenth-century readers of all three manuscripts might have understood themselves somewhat flexibly in relation to their "lay" or "clerical" status. The gender and social fluidity of the devotional meditations encouraged in relation to the Heavenly Marriage of the Lamb image in Pepys contrast with the apparently more demarcated boundaries between audiences' perceived capacity for grasping different levels of scriptural exegesis. And if Brussels became an adaptable model for subsequent forms of Apocalypse imagery, just as the Corpus-Lambeth stem or the lost Pepys archetype were copied or reworked as needed, there appear to have been forms of production, as well of piety, that transcended gender in important ways.

Taking a more historical and contextual perspective, Bartal connects the pictorial variety of all three Apocalypses to the "visual strategies employed by English pastoral educators" (146) after the Fourth Lateran Council. While thirteenth-century manuscripts such as the Lambeth Apocalypse contained pastoral material that remained separate from their Biblical pictorial cycles, "moral and devotional content invades and transforms the illustrations of the biblical narrative" (148) by the fourteenth century. The three manuscripts also reveal much about methods of workshop production. Manuscripts could be copied from shared workshop maquettes or combine multiple visual models. Creating new image cycles through such compilations, the illuminators reveal "their level of theological awareness, sophistication, and [their] ability to cater to diverse reader-viewers" (150).

Instructors of courses on late medieval English and European spirituality and theology, religious and intellectual culture, the history of the book, and female cultural patronage in the Middle Ages will find much in this book to recommend to their students. Bartal's arguments are models of careful visual analysis, and her study has been generously illustrated to enable the viewer to follow each one. It is unfortunate that the physical size of the page, its text and its margins sometimes makes for a somewhat cramped appearance. Some of the half-page illustrations within the text (for example figures 1.4, 1.12 a and b, 1.15) are especially difficult to make out. As one of the earliest Ashgate books to be published following the house's incorporation into the Taylor & Francis Group, art historians will hope that Ashgate's new life as an imprint of Routledge will not stop its books doing full justice to high-quality scholarship. Discussing manuscripts difficult to access through facsimiles or online digitisations (this reviewer could only find the Selden Apocalypse online, at: http://apocalypse.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/the-manuscripts/), a great deal of new material has been brought to wider scholarly attention in this book, framed by the author's perceptive analysis and careful contextualisation. Bartal is especially successful in integrating an expert consideration of workshop practices and production with a nuanced analysis of audience, use and function.

By interrogating difference rather than seeking similarities, this study offers a valuable new perspective on the later English Apocalypse tradition. It challenges perceptions of illuminators as rude craftsmen, highlights the cultural patronage and intellectual interests of a diverse range of fourteenth-century audiences, and explores

the multiple textual, social, devotional and pastoral contexts in which fourteenth-century Apocalypse manuscripts can be sited with great insight and expertise. ❧

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